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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Lithuania as a nation has a great past. Although it has been definitely established that the country was in existence before the twelfth century, there is a long shadowy period preceding her recorded history.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Lithuanian people form a distinct race and they speak their own language, which is wholly different from the languages of the neighboring countries of Russia, Poland, and Germany. Philologists find the Lithuanian language very helpful for comparative language studies and research, and some of them have found Lithuanian to be very close to the Sanskrit.

The first to mention and describe the people on the Baltic shores was the Roman writer, Tacitus, who at the end of the first century, in his treatise *Germania*, calls them *aestii, aestiorum gentes*.[1]

The Aestii, like most European peoples (Germanic, Slavic, Celtic, Italian, Hellenic), belong to the Indo-European family of nations, although whence the Aestii came to the Baltic shores is still a problem to historians. Philologists find three groups of Aestii: Prussians (Lithuanian *Prusai;* German

[1] A. Sapoka, *Lietuvos Istorija* (History of Lithuania), Svietimo Ministerijos K.L.K. Leidinys, Kaunas, p. 18.

Preussen; Latin *Borusi*), Latvians (Lithuanian *latviai;* German *Letten*), and Lithuanians (Lithuanian *lietuviai;* German *Litauer*). The main distinction among these three groups was that they spoke different dialects of the Lithuanian language.

The Prussians were conquered by the Teutonic Order in the thirteenth century. Castles were built in the conquered regions, and around them German colonists settled. Within fifty years (by 1280) the Prussians had virtually come under German control, although they defended themselves vigorously. In 1243 and again in 1260 there were big uprisings. In the course of years the Prussians were partly exterminated, while those remaining were assimilated and eventually adopted the German language.[2] But as late as the eighteenth century Lithuanian was the dominating language of the population in the region stretching from Königsberg north and east to the Lithuanian-German border.

The Latvians (Letts) were divided into several tribes, namely, Kursiai, Zemgaliai, and Latgaliai. Another, wholly distinct, group called Livs (Latin *Libii*) lived in the basin of the Dauguva. This group belonged to the Ugro-Finnic family of nations, to which the Estonians, Finns, and Hungarians belong. When German merchants and missionaries began to visit the natives of the basin of the Dauguva, they first met the Liv tribes, and thereafter they referred to all of that country as Livonia. In this way the Teutonic Knights of that part of the country came to be known as the Livonian Order (*Fratres Militiae Christi* or Livonian Order of Swordbearers). Despite over six centuries of subjugation to the Germans and later to Russian rule and influence, the

[2] A. E. Ewald, *Die Eroberung Preussens durch den Deutschen* (The Robbery of Prussians by Germans), 1884, Vols. I–IV; M. Oeler, *Geschichte des deutschen Ritter Ordens* (The History of the Teutonic Knights), 1908.

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Latvians have preserved their language and their national spirit. After the World War Latvia declared her independence and dropped the name of Livonia.[3]

The Lithuanians are considered to be the main division of the Aestii. They themselves were divided into Zemaiciai (Samogitians), Sudavai, Jotvingiai, and Aukstaiciai (Highlanders). At the end of the twelfth century the Lithuanians began to form a state, because continual wars with the Teutonic Order in the west (Prussia) and in the north (Livonia) forced them to unite. The first crowned king of Lithuania was Mindaugas (Mindow, Mendog), who conquered all the other chieftains, in 1251 adopted Christianity, which had been brought by the Teutonic Knights, and in 1253 was crowned.[4]

At the same time the Samogitians, who continued to fight the Knights of the Livonian Order, succeeded in checking them from making further inroads into the Lithuanian territories. In their effort to conquer the Samogitians, the Teutonic Knights in 1252 built a castle in the vicinity of Klaipeda, to which they gave the German name Memel.

Soon after the death of Mindaugas, Christianity disappeared almost completely in Lithuania.

In the period of 1295–1316 Lithuania was ruled by Vytenis (Witen), who was succeeded by Gediminas (Gedimin), 1316–41. So many Russian territories were incorporated in the latter's state that the new lands greatly exceeded in size ethnographic Lithuania. The title of the ruler in the documents was therefore *Rex Lithuanorum et Multorum Ruthenorum.*[5]

[3] Sapoka, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[4] J. Totoraitis, *Die Litauer unter dem Koenig Mindowe* (The Lithuanians under King Mindowe), 1905.
[5] Sapoka, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

000 between the surface and the underground layers change according to surroundings, background and era. Sometimes they tighten, at other times they have no balanced relationship. They seldom coalesce. Each stratum has its own measure of motion and time.

[101] 175 [172] A branch of the Indo-European family which to-day speaks one of Europe's oldest languages, the Lithuanians, settled away from the great travelled routes, were spared for a long period from revolutionary changes. The Iron Age was prolonged until the 12th century of our era. For all that, it was not an archaic culture. The objects found in graves are of an advanced type. Textile industry, metal objects, ceramics, fortifications are testimony of a clearly defined social structure and a political organization. According to the Ancients these populations were industrious and peaceful and devoted to a rustic life. The road of amber[2] from the deposits along the banks of their rivers, connected them with the Mediterranean world Gradually exchanges became more frequent. The pressure of the Goths did not directly affect these homes, but nevertheless, its repercussions were felt. In the period of migration the frontiers and the interior positions became more precise. The first strongholds called *"piliakalniai"* — were erected at strategic points. Soon Scandinavians and Russians appeared upon the scene. King Olaf of Sweden attacked the city of Apulia, — the Apuolé of to-day — Kiev menaced the people of Nemunas (Niemen), but later became a goal of Lithuanian conquests. In the West, Rimbert, a monk of Corbie, was one of the first in the IXth century to report[3] on a township called Apuolé.

These different movements did not destroy the unity of development, but on the contrary strengthened it. Subsistence of faiths and practices continued. Entrance into history proper did not put an end to their existence. It was not a rupture, but a new phase. The prehistoric gods were not dead. For a long period adoration of the forces of nature, the stars, the thunder and all the genii of field and forest persisted. Princes were baptized in the 13th and 14th centuries, but the people's religion remained unimpaired. Penetrating the country, Christianity had to face the local myths. Frequently it mixed with them: Christ and *"Perkúnas"*, the Thunderer, had the same worshippers. It was the same favor which was transferred from the one to the other. This fidelity did not mean retrogression. Lithuania had her historic mission. She marks the limit of the barbarian

2 [Errata: should be The Amber-road. Cf. Errata Sheet, p. 204, cat. 116--- Analyst]

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MONOGRAPH OF LITHUANIA

INTRODUCTION

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The Lithuania of to-day is situated between East Prussia, Poland and Latvia. In the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Lithuania was an independent State which, having conquered vast stretches of White Russia and Ukraine, extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea; her civilisation was that of Western Europe. At the close of the fourteenth century, Lithuania established with Poland a personal union, which was subsequently converted into a real union. For centuries, the conditions governing her existence were the same as for Poland. With the partition of 1795, practically the whole of ethnographical Lithuania was annexed by Russia, which ruled the territory until 1915.

A vast region inhabited by a population of Lithuanian origin and extending westwards almost as far as Marienburg had been conquered by the Germans in the tenth and twelfth centuries.

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As long as Lithuania remained under the dominion of Russia, her economic and cultural level was conditioned by

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